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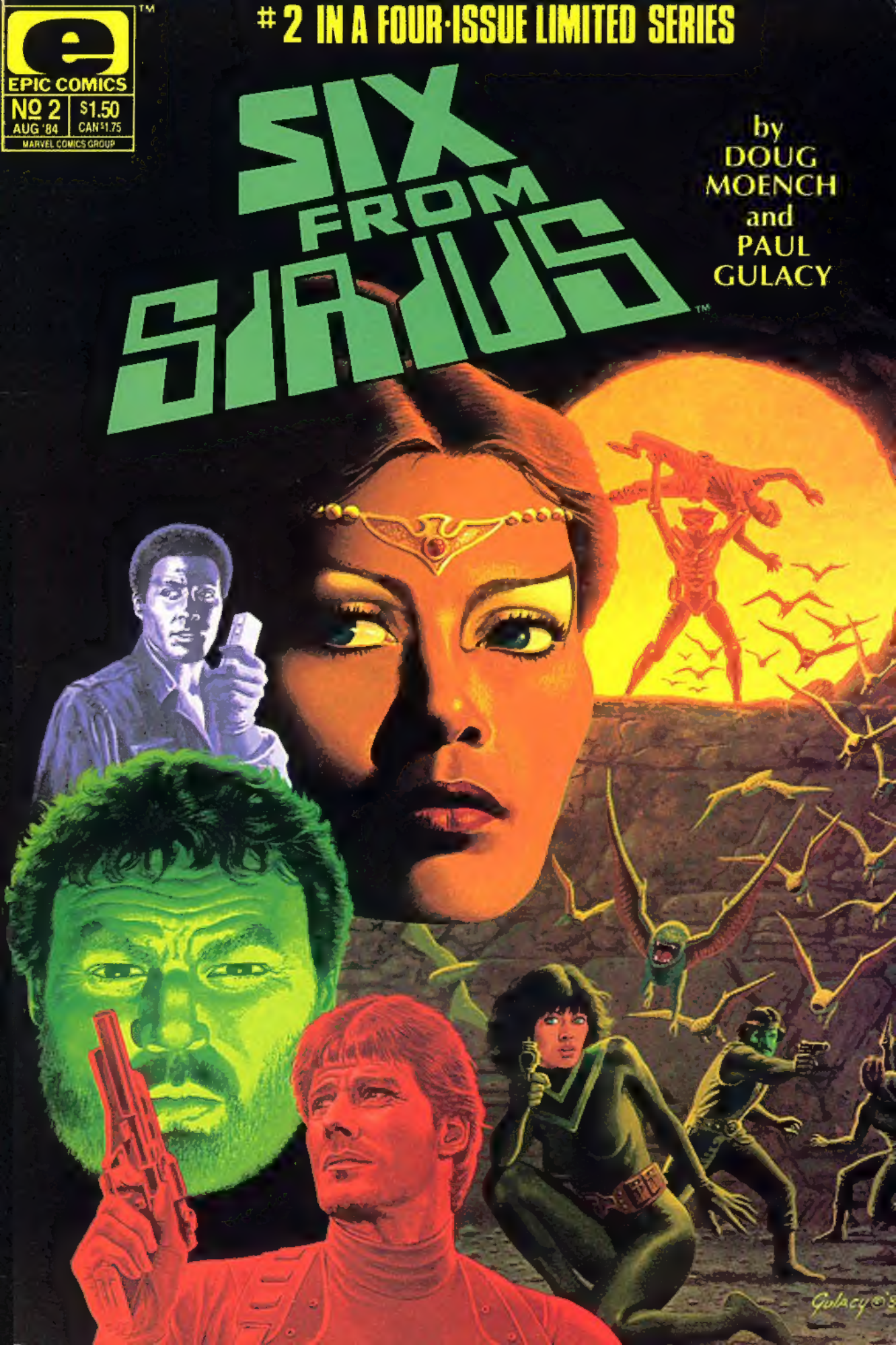
SIX FROM SIRIUS™

by DOUG MOENCH and PAUL GULACY



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IN PHASE I OF SIX FROM SIX FROM SIRIUS . . .

We learned that six more-or-less freelance agents were commissioned by officials of Sirius Hub for a complex mission whose motives were not entirely clear.

Knowing only that a potential conflict brewed between the neighboring planets Axellon and Balsamo, their initial objective was the rescue of a prisoner named *Phaedra*, from the impregnable space station Roundwall, manned by functional facsimilies of men appropriately known as fax-men. Phaedra was the Balsamo ambassador to the scheduled Peace Negotiations on Axellon's moon, Heavenstone. Why was she incarcerated by her own people?

Fighting their way through a horde of fax-men, the six found they had one final problem: Phaedra did not *care* to be rescued.

She was rescued anyway.

Now seven aboard the Sirius-6, they were further briefed by the atomized "ghost" of Hub Collator Jaquandor. In the not too distant past, it seemed, a group of Spiritualists led by "the Five Elders" were systematically persecuted by Axellon's planet-wide government. An exodus to Axellon's dead moon was requested — once the moon could be made habitable. Eager to be rid of the "nonproductive" Spritiualists, the Axellon government readily ceded permission. To their surprise, however, the moon was not only rendered habitable, it was sculpted into a "paradise" newly named Heavenstone. The source of funding for this new world's lavish creation was unknown, but Axellon's suspicions pointed firmly toward the rival world Balsamo — suspicions apparently confirmed when Balsamo Parbeam weapons were installed on Heavenstone with full complicity of the new Spiritualist residents. A very large sword now dangled directly over Axellon's head.

AND NOW . . .

PHASE II MASTERFAX

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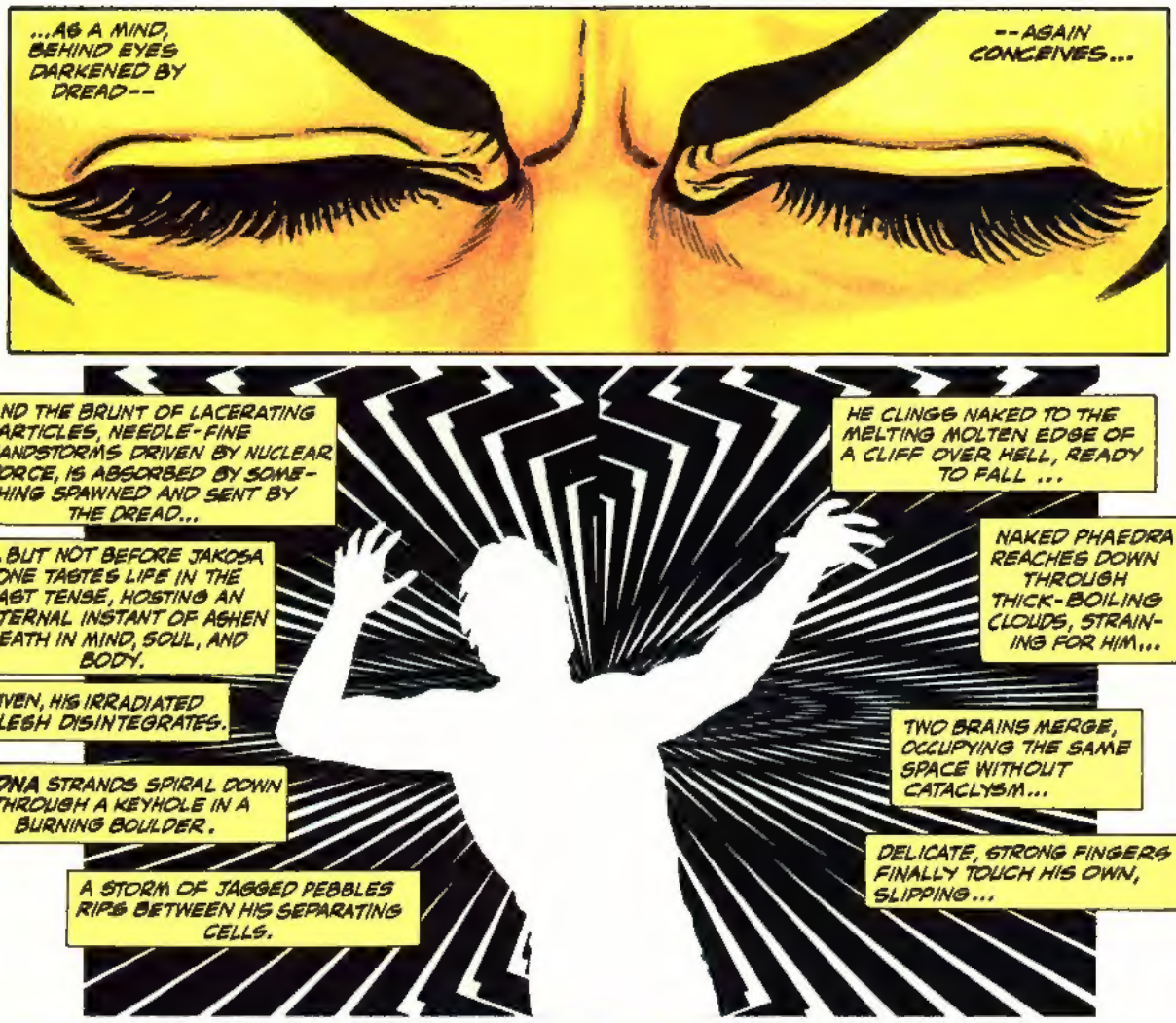
AM I NOW PERMITTED AN OUTBURST?
IF SO, I WILL AGAIN CALL YOU A LIAR!
YOU ARE JUST LIKE THE AXELLONS--SEEING EVIL IN EVERY ACT, DEMONS LURKING BEHIND EVERY SMILE!
FREE AND OPEN TRADE IS HARDLY THE SAME AS SMUGGLING WEAPONS!
THE FACT THAT BALSAMO SHIPS HAVE GONE TO HEAVENSTONE MEANS NOTHING!
PERHAPS NOT, AMBASSADOR PHAEDRA, BUT SIRIUS SWARM HAS EVIDENCE WHICH DOES MEAN SOMETHING--WE HAVE PROOF.
AND SMUGGLING IS THE WRONG WORD--SINCE THE PARBEAM WEAPONS ARE BEING RECEIVED ON HEAVENSTONE WITH THE FULL COMPLICITY OF THE SPIRITUALIST INHABITANTS.
NOW YOU HAVE TRULY VENTURED INTO THE REALM OF THE ABSURD! THE HEAVENSTONERS ABHOR WEAPONRY OF ANY KIND! WHY WOULD THEY--
THAT IS AN ABIDING MYSTERY EVEN TO US, AMBASSADOR...
...ITS SOLUTION INCIDENTALLY BEING ONE OF YOUR MISSION'S ANCILLARY OBJECTIVES, LONE.
THAT, AND WHO FUNDED THE SCULPTING OF HEAVENSTONE IN THE FIRST PLACE.
YES, SIR.
NO!
EVEN IF EVERYTHING YOU SAY IS TRUE, HOW COULD I NOT KNOW OF IT!
IN MY CAPACITY AS AMBASSADOR, I WOULD HAVE TO PLAY AN INTEGRAL ROLE IN ANY SUCH DECEPTION!
I BELIEVE, AMBASSADOR, THAT YOU ONCE CONTEMPLATED RESIGNING YOUR POST, SO THAT YOU YOURSELF COULD LIVE ON HEAVENSTONE...?
THE WORDS STING, SENDING A CLOUD'S SLOW SHADOW ACROSS HER EYES...
THE...THE FAITH WAS NOT STRONG ENOUGH IN ME... SUCH A LIFE... APPEALING AS AN IDEAL, BUT IN THE REAL WORLDS...

LET'S JUST SAY... I'M TOO MUCH THE PRAGMATIST...
MEANING--?
NEVERTHELESS, YOUR SUPERIORS ON BALSAMO ARE AWARE OF YOUR SYMPATHIES, ARE THEY NOT?
MEANING THAT IF WHAT I'VE EXPLAINED IS TRUE, THEN YOUR OWN GOVERNMENT WOULD INDEED HAVE CAUSE TO HOLD YOU PRISONER ON ROUNDWALL, AND TO NOW PURSUE YOUR DEATH--
ALL IN AN EFFORT TO DEPRIVE YOU FROM REACHING HEAVENSTONE TO LEARN THE TRUTH FIRSTHAND.
NO! IT CAN'T BE TRUE--!
ALL I ASK IS THAT YOU TRUST YOUR SIX GIRIAN ESCORTS--GO WITH THEM TO HEAVENSTONE, AND PARTICIPATE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH AN OPEN MIND.
LIES... ALL LIES...
THAT IS ALL.
ZEMATIN-LAR, IF YOU WOULD BE KIND ENOUGH TO TRANSPORT ME BACK TO SIRIUS HUB, I HAVE AN IMPORTANT--
TEK
AGHHHHH!!
JAKOSA! SOMETHING'S WRONG!
INTERFERENCE IN THE PULSE CONVERSION!
THE SYSTEM IS BEING... INVADED!
THEN SHUT IT OFF-- FAST!

I...I CAN'T, JAKOSA!
IT'S TOO LATE!!
IN WET HEAT, THE 100 TRILLION CELLS OF THE COLLATOR VAPORIZE.
SKREED! STARN! GET PHAEDRA OUT OF HERE!!
LOOK, STARN!
THAT SHAPE--! THE CONVEYOR WAS BREACHED--JUST AS THE COLLATOR'S MOLECULES WERE SCRAMBLING FOR TRANSPORT...
AND THE TWO MASSES COULDN'T OCCUPY THE SAME SPACE!
ZEMMIE...
BEHIND YOU, JAKOSA...
MASTERFAX HAS ORDERS.
OH... MY... GOD...
DESTROY LEADER FIRST-- THEN TAKE PHAEDRA.
ZEMATIN'S HELPLESS-- GOT TO GET AWAY FROM HER-- DRAW ITS ATTACK ELSEWHERE!
A BALSAMO FAX-MAN! THEN IT'S TRUE--THEY WANT TO KILL ME!
AND JAKOSA! HE'S IN--
COME ON, LADY! HE CAN--
PARTICLE BEAMS ERUPT--


...AS A MIND, BEHIND EYES DARKENED BY DREAD--
--AGAIN CONCEIVES...
AND THE BRUNT OF LACERATING PARTICLES, NEEDLE-FINE SANDSTORMS DRIVEN BY NUCLEAR FORCE, IS ABSORBED BY SOMETHING SPAWNED AND SENT BY THE DREAD...
...BUT NOT BEFORE JAKOSA LONE TASTES LIFE IN THE PAST TENSE, HOSTING AN ETERNAL INSTANT OF ASHEN DEATH IN MIND, SOUL, AND BODY.
RIVEN, HIS IRRADIATED FLESH DISINTEGRATES.
DNA STRANDS SPIRAL DOWN THROUGH A KEYHOLE IN A BURNING BOULDER.
A STORM OF JAGGED PEBBLES RIPS BETWEEN HIS SEPARATING CELLS.
HE CLINGS NAKED TO THE MELTING MOLTEN EDGE OF A CLIFF OVER HELL, READY TO FALL ...
NAKED PHAEDRA REACHES DOWN THROUGH THICK-BOILING CLOUDS, STRAINING FOR HIM...
TWO BRAINS MERGE, OCCUPYING THE SAME SPACE WITHOUT CATACLYSM...
DELICATE, STRONG FINGERS FINALLY TOUCH HIS OWN, SLIPPING...

...AND--
ALIVE?

--RECONSTITUTED, HE RETURNS TO NOW.
--TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF!
WAIT A MINUTE-- WHAT DID I JUST SEE?!
HE TOOK TWIN 660-BLASTS POINT-BLANK--AND HE'S STILL IN ONE PIECE?! BUT HOW IN THE--
NEVER MIND HOW, STARN!
JAKOSA LIVES-- AND FACT MUST BE PRESERVED!

MASTER FAX HAS ORDERS!
DESTROY LEADER FIRST, THEN--
YOU!
MUST REACH... WALL...
GROD! WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?! THAT THING DOESN'T EVEN DENT!
C-CAN'T HELP HIM... DIZZY... MIND NUMB...

GROD REACHED WALL...

...AND DECK TAKES MASTERFAX--UNDENTED.

HURRY, JAKOSA! OUT IN THE CORRIDOR--BEFORE IT CLIMBS BACK UP!

WE'RE COMING, LaMASQUE--GET READY TO SEAL THE HATCH!

CAN YOU MAKE IT, ZEM-ATIN?

I...I'LL LIVE...

AND, IN THE CORRIDOR...

LET'S GET AS FAR FROM THAT CHAMBER AS POSSIBLE!

I'VE GOT A FEELING IT WON'T BE FAR ENOUGH!

ANY BETTER IDEAS, STARN?

NOPE--JUST FEELINGS!

THEN LET'S MOVE.

AND WITHOUT FURTHER PRODDING DID THEY OBEY, CARING LITTLE FOR ANOTHER ENCOUNTER WITH SIR MASTERFAX THE UN-STOPPABLE...

BUT IN THE MATTER--CONVEYOR CHAMBER...

SKRUNCH

YOU WERE TELLING THE TRUTH, JAKOSA LONE...

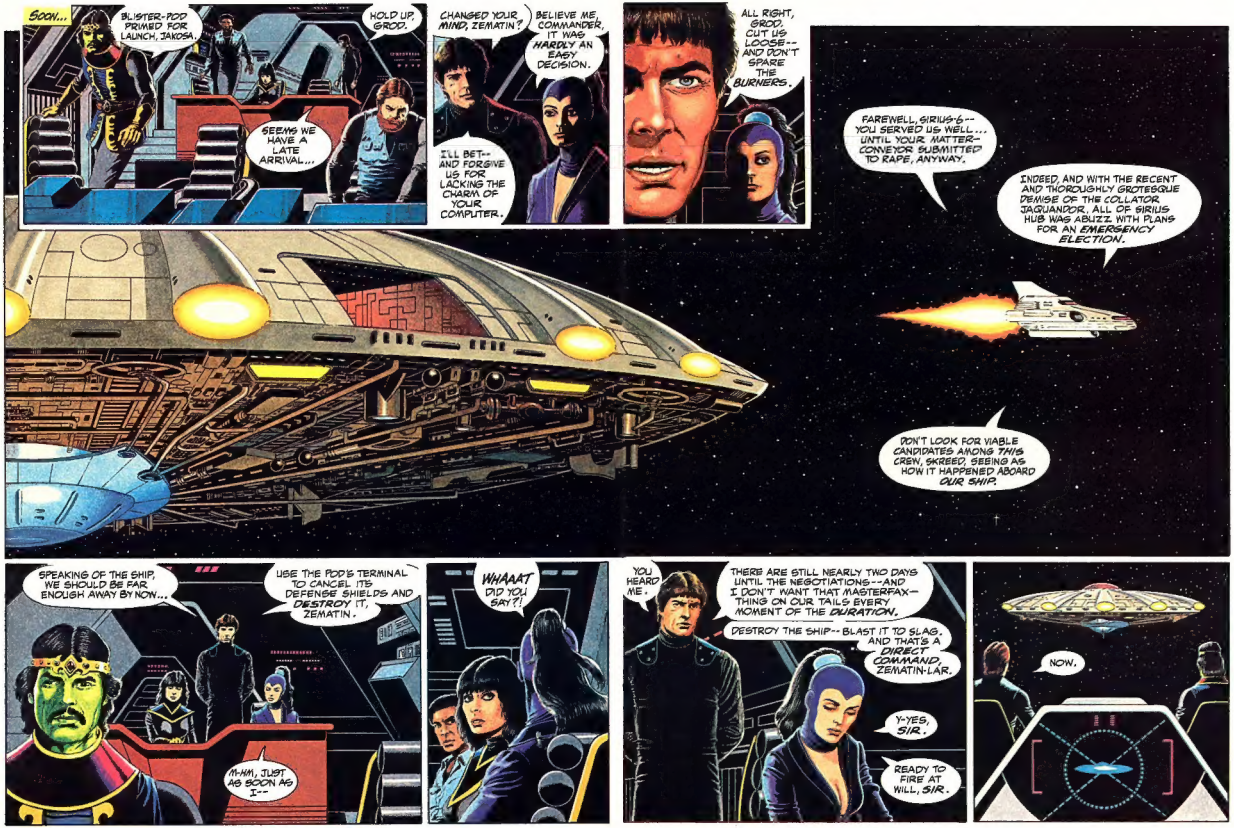
I...I'M SORRY I--

SAVE IT FOR LATER, AMBASSADOR, WHEN YOU EXPLAIN WHY I DIDN'T DIE BACK THERE.

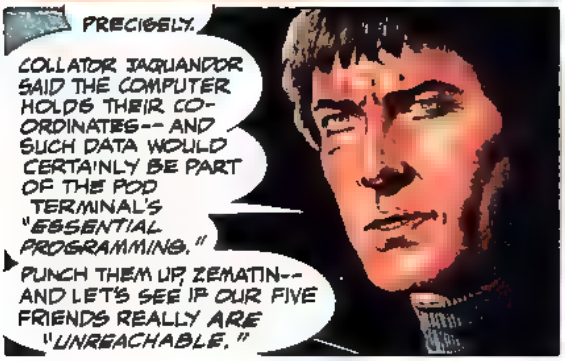
SKRUNCHT

BEHIND US--!

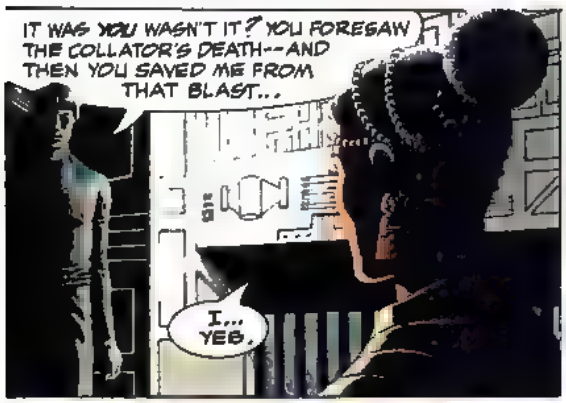
IF HE GETS THROUGH THAT HATCH...THEN HE CAN GET THROUGH ANY HATCH... ANY WALL OR BULKHEAD... ABOARD SHIP!
THAT IS BECOMING OBVIOUS, LaMASQUE-- MEANING WE ABANDON SHIP.
WHAT--?!
LEAVE THE COMPUTER?!
FROOM
AS LONG AS IT'S PART OF THIS DEATH-TRAP, ZEMATIN--
--I DON'T SEE MUCH CHOICE!
BUT--
MOVE, ZEMATIN!
THE BLISTER-POD'S EQUIPPED WITH AN AUXILIARY TERMINAL, ISN'T IT?
IT'S A CRETIN-- LIMITED TO ESSENTIAL PROGRAMS ONLY!
YOU ALWAYS WERE THE STUBBORN ONE, ZEMMIE-- BUT IF YOU WANT TO STAY BEHIND AND SHARE YOUR PRECIOUS COMPUTER WITH OUR UNINVITED GUEST...
...I SUGGEST YOU OFFER HIM A DRINK TO SOOTHE HIS RUFFLES!
UH...ON SECOND THOUGHT...
FROOM
WAIT UP!!

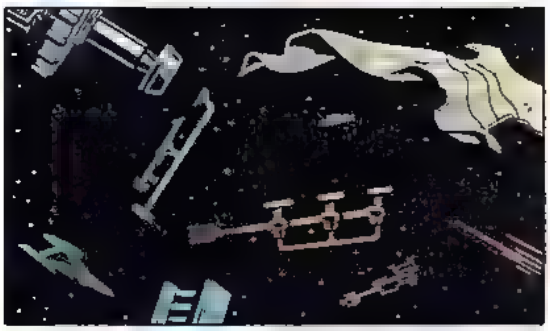

SOON...
BLISTER-POD PRIMED FOR LAUNCH, JAKOSA.
HOLD UP, GRODD.
SEEMS WE HAVE A LATE ARRIVAL...
CHANGED YOUR MIND, ZEMATIN?
BELIEVE ME, COMMANDER, IT WAS HARDLY AN EASY DECISION.
I'LL BET-- AND FORGIVE US FOR LACKING THE CHARM OF YOUR COMPUTER.
ALL RIGHT, GRODD, CUT US LOOSE-- AND DON'T SPARE THE BURNERS.
FAREWELL, SIRIUS-6-- YOU SERVED US WELL... UNTIL YOUR MATTER-CONVEYOR SUBMITTED TO RAPE, ANYWAY.
INDEED, AND WITH THE RECENT AND THOROUGHLY GROTESQUE DEMISE OF THE COLLATOR JAGUANDOR, ALL OF SIRIUS HUB WAS ABUZZ WITH PLANS FOR AN EMERGENCY ELECTION.
DON'T LOOK FOR VIABLE CANDIDATES AMONG THIS CREW, SKREED, SEEING AS HOW IT HAPPENED ABOARD OUR SHIP.
SPEAKING OF THE SHIP, WE SHOULD BE FAR ENOUGH AWAY BY NOW...
USE THE PODS TERMINAL TO CANCEL ITS DEFENSE SHIELDS AND DESTROY IT, ZEMATIN.
M-HM, JUST AS SOON AS I--
WHAAAT DID YOU SAY?!
YOU HEARD ME.
THERE ARE STILL NEARLY TWO DAYS UNTIL THE NEGOTIATIONS--AND I DON'T WANT THAT MASTERFAX-THING ON OUR TAILS EVERY MOMENT OF THE DURATION.
DESTROY THE SHIP-- BLAST IT TO SLAG, AND THAT'S A DIRECT COMMAND, ZEMATIN-LAR.
Y-YES, SIR.
READY TO FIRE AT WILL, SIR.
NOW.

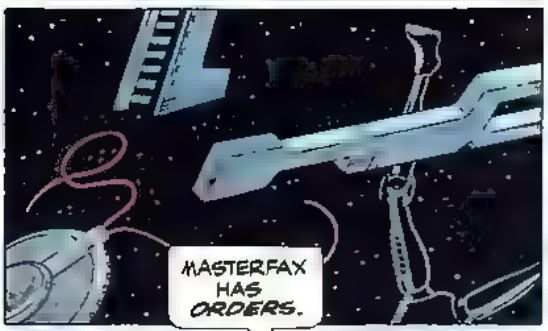
SHIP DESTROYED, COMMANDER... AND ALONG WITH IT, THE MAIN COMPUTER...
AS WELL AS MASTERFAX, ZEMATIN.
IF YOU WANT TO LEVEL ANY CRUELTY TO COMPUTER CHARGES, HE'S YOUR CULPRIT--MAY HE RUST IN PEACE.
I STASHED PHAEDRA IN THE OTHER CABIN, JAKOSA--BUT NOW WHAT? WHERE DO WE GO? WE CAN'T STAY HERE FOR TWO DAYS--AND HEAVENSTONE WOULD BE THE FIRST PLACE THEY'D LOOK.
IT'S PROBABLY CRAWLING WITH BALSAMO SHOCK-TROOPERS AND FAX-MEN RIGHT NOW.
WHICH ELIMINATES EVERYTHING EXCEPT AXELLON, DOESN'T IT?
BUT WE HAVE NO CLEARING TO LAND THERE.
THE AXELLONS WILL BE JUST AS HOSTILE TO US AS THE BALSAMOITES.
OH, I DON'T KNOW, LaMASQUE--WE MIGHT HAVE FIVE FRIENDS ON THE PLANET.

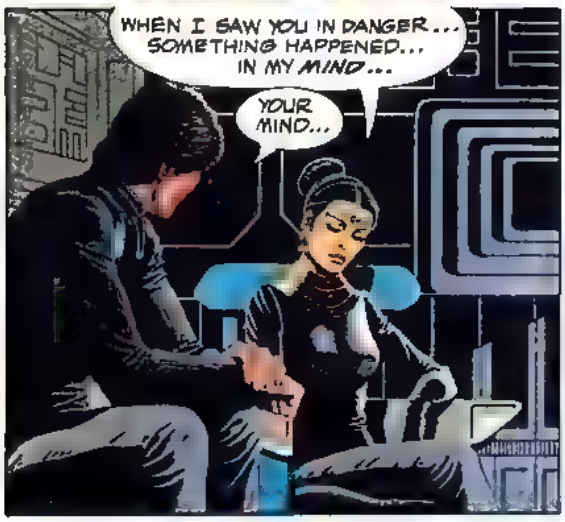

PRECISELY.
COLLATOR JAQUANDOR SAID THE COMPUTER HOLDS THEIR CO-ORDINATES-- AND SUCH DATA WOULD CERTAINLY BE PART OF THE POD TERMINAL'S "ESSENTIAL PROGRAMMING."
PUNCH THEM UP, ZEMATIN-- AND LET'S SEE IF OUR FIVE FRIENDS REALLY ARE "UNREACHABLE."

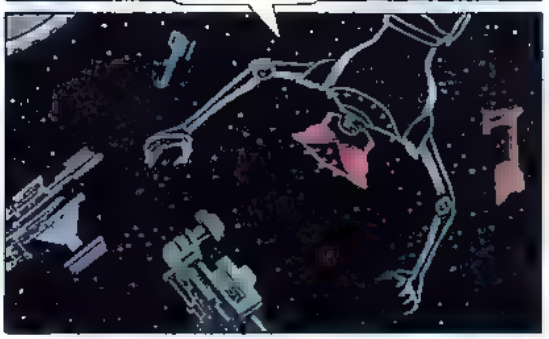
AND, AS ZEMATIN-LAR BEGINS HER ACCESS-SEARCH, JAKOSA ENTERS THE POD'S REAR CABIN...

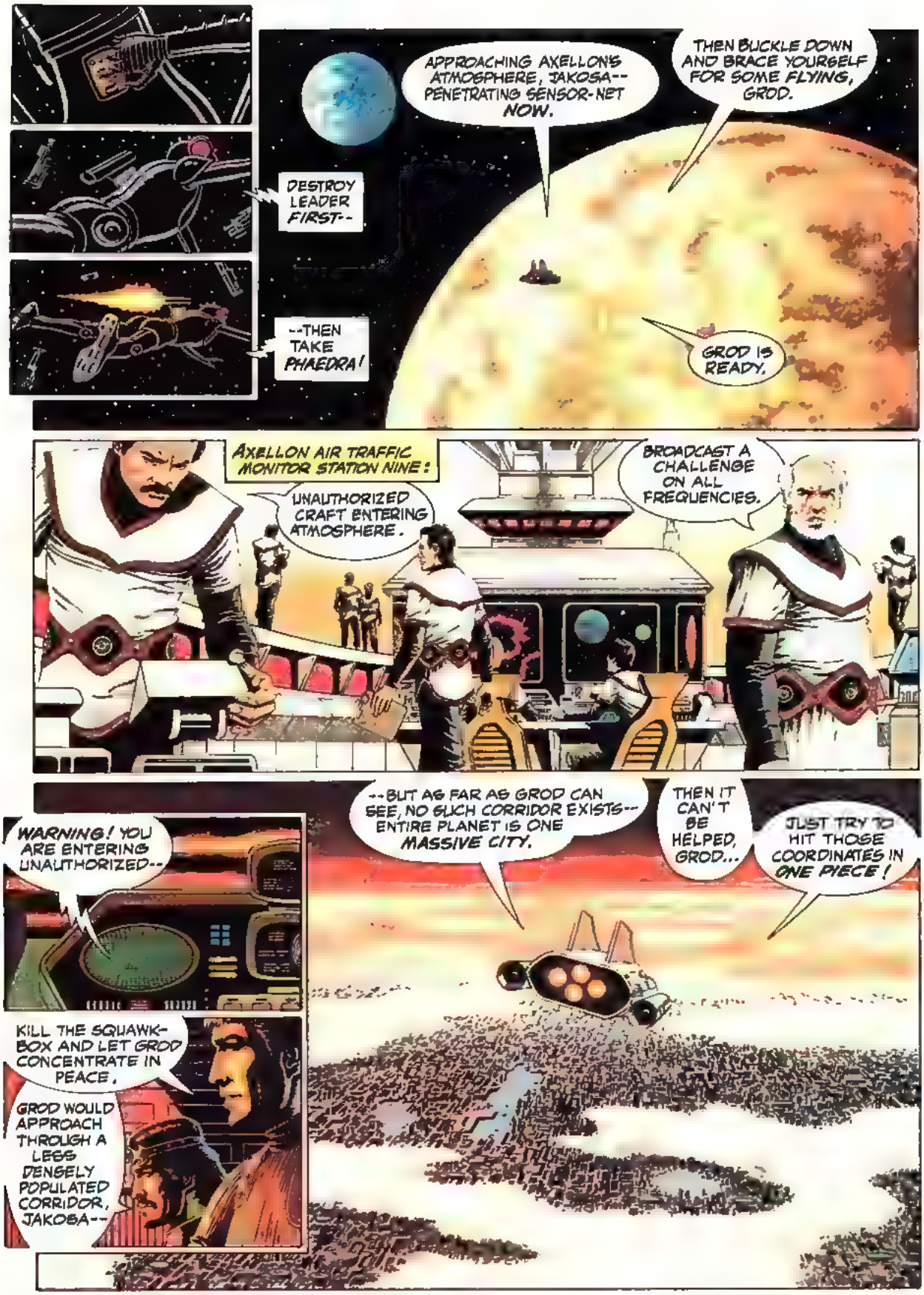


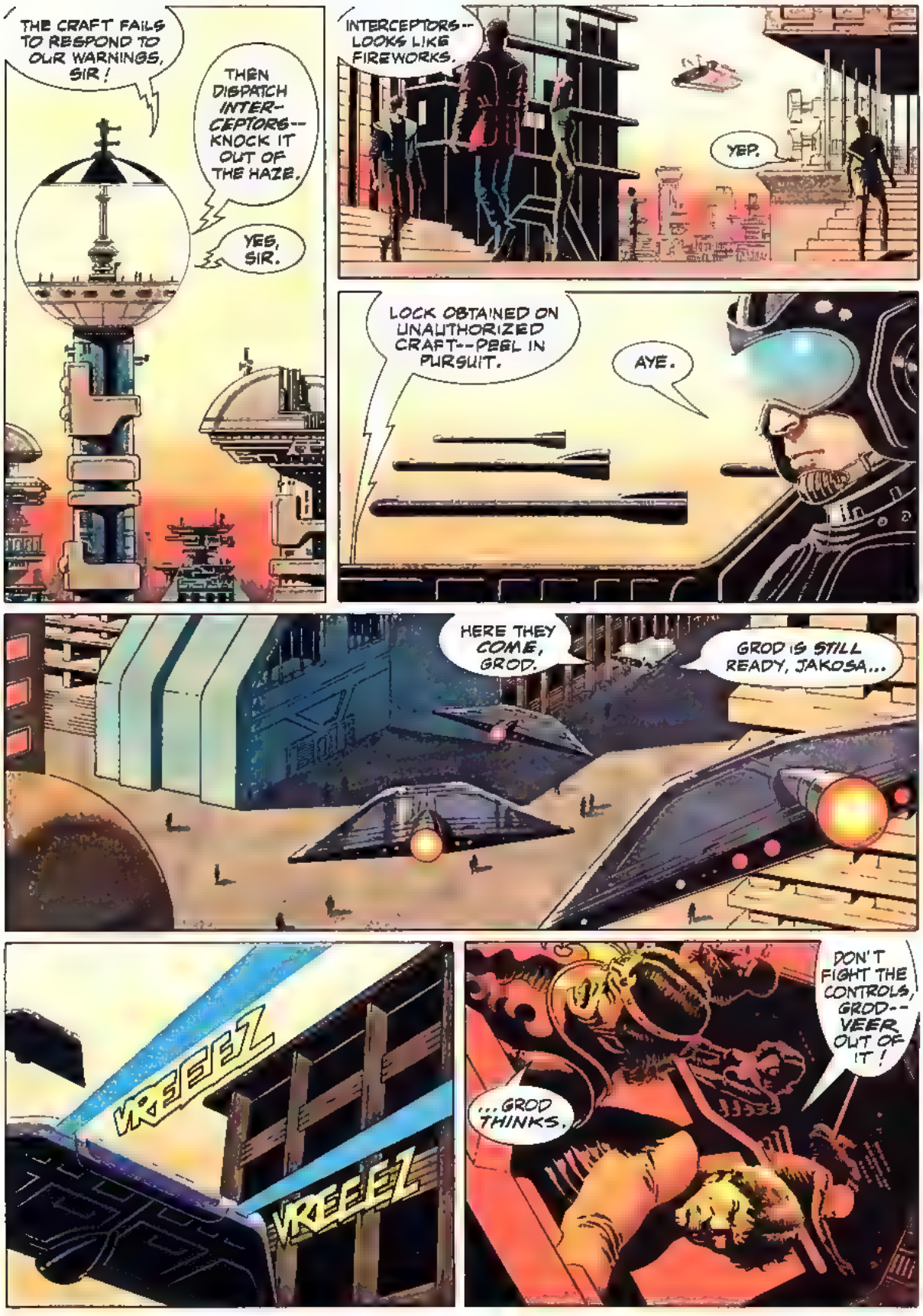


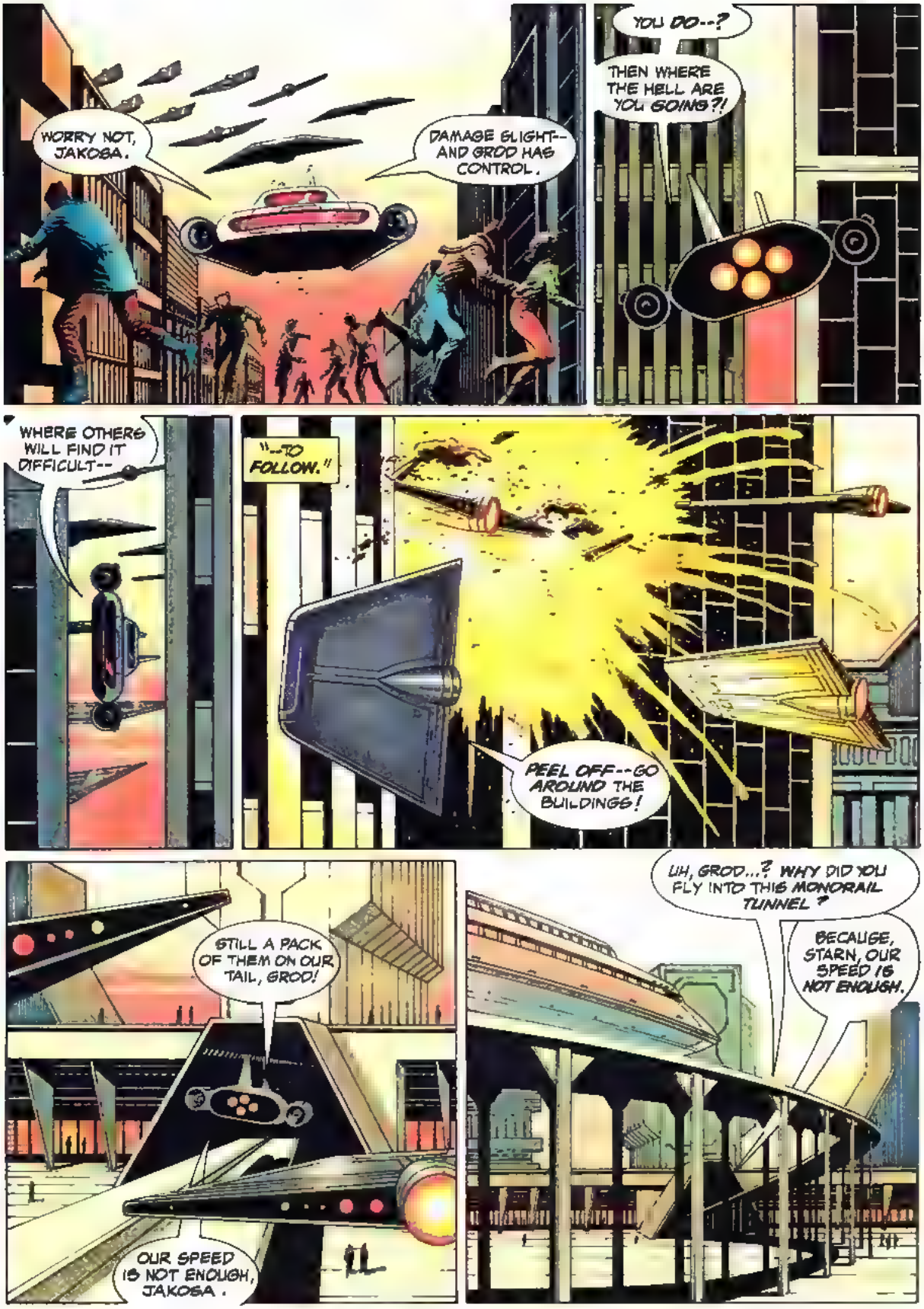







APPROACHING AXELLON'S ATMOSPHERE, JAKOSA-- PENETRATING SENSOR-NET NOW.
THEN BUCKLE DOWN AND BRACE YOURSELF FOR SOME FLYING, GROD.
DESTROY LEADER FIRST--
--THEN TAKE PHAEDRA!
GROD IS READY.
AXELLON AIR TRAFFIC MONITOR STATION NINE:
UNAUTHORIZED CRAFT ENTERING ATMOSPHERE.
BROADCAST A CHALLENGE ON ALL FREQUENCIES.
WARNING! YOU ARE ENTERING UNAUTHORIZED--
KILL THE SQUAWK-BOX AND LET GROD CONCENTRATE IN PEACE.
GROD WOULD APPROACH THROUGH A LESS DENSELY POPULATED CORRIDOR, JAKOSA--
--BUT AS FAR AS GROD CAN SEE, NO SUCH CORRIDOR EXISTS-- ENTIRE PLANET IS ONE MASSIVE CITY.
THEN IT CAN'T BE HELPED, GROD...
JUST TRY TO HIT THOSE COORDINATES IN ONE PIECE!


THE CRAFT FAILS TO RESPOND TO OUR WARNINGS, SIR!
THEN DISPATCH INTER-CEPTORS-- KNOCK IT OUT OF THE HAZE.
YES, SIR.
INTERCEPTORS-- LOOKS LIKE FIREWORKS.
YEP.
LOCK OBTAINED ON UNAUTHORIZED CRAFT--PEEL IN PURSUIT.
AYE.
HERE THEY COME, GROD.
GROD IS STILL READY, JAKOSA...
VREEEZ
VREEEZ
DON'T FIGHT THE CONTROLS, GROD-- VEER OUT OF IT!
...GROD THINKS.


WORRY NOT, JAKOSA.
DAMAGE SLIGHT--AND GRODD HAS CONTROL.
YOU DO--?
THEN WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU GOING?!
WHERE OTHERS WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT--
"--TO FOLLOW."
PEEL OFF--GO AROUND THE BUILDINGS!
STILL A PACK OF THEM ON OUR TAIL, GRODD!
OUR SPEED IS NOT ENOUGH, JAKOSA.
UH, GRODD...? WHY DID YOU FLY INTO THIS MONORAIL TUNNEL?
BECAUSE, STARN, OUR SPEED IS NOT ENOUGH.

SO IT WAS A *STUPID QUESTION*, BIG FELLOW-- BUT DID YOU HAVE TO CUT THE ANSWER *SO CLOSE?*

YES, STARN...

"...FOR GOOD REASON...

"...FOR *VERY* GOOD REASON..."

DAMN!

WE LOST ANOTHER ONE IN THE *TUNNEL*-- NOT TO MENTION THE *COMMUTER TRAM!*

UNAUTHORIZED CRAFT NOW VECTORED FOR *NULL SECTOR*, SIR.

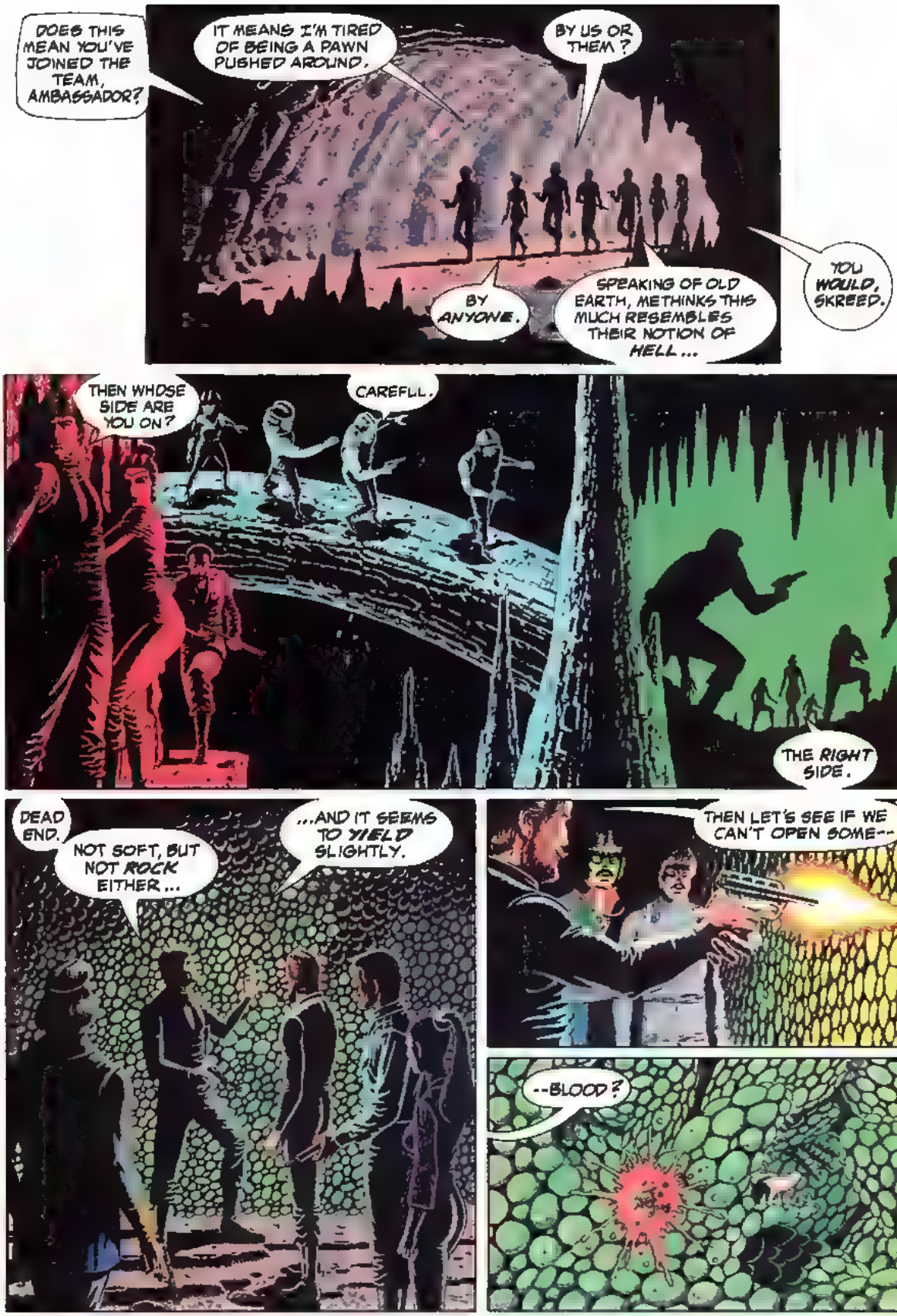
LET IT GO, THEN-- CALL BACK ALL INTERCEPTORS.

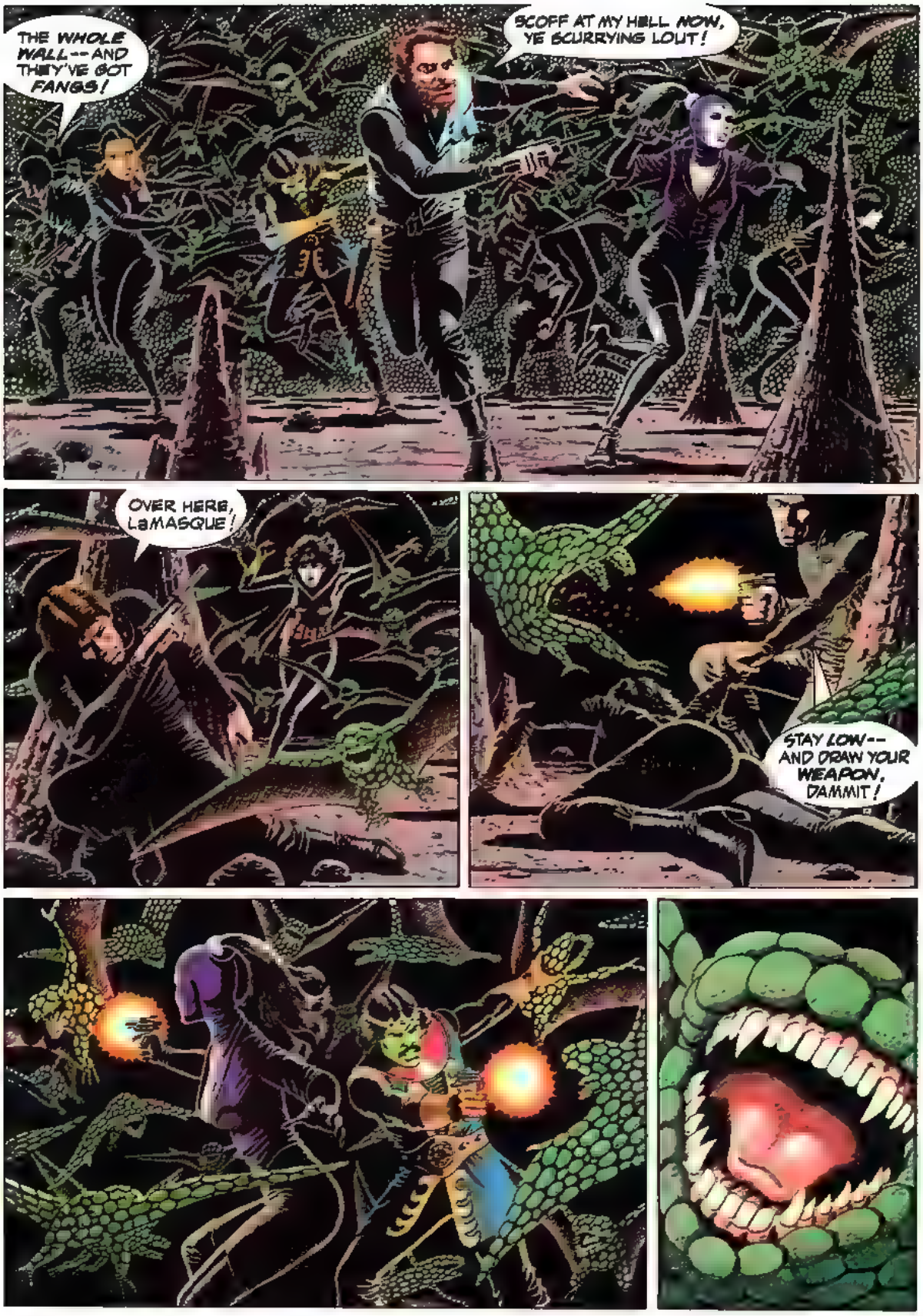
NO SENSE RISKING ADDITIONAL CASUALTIES--NOT WHEN THE CRAFT IS DOOMED ANYWAY.

AS YOU COMMAND, SIR!

I DON'T UNDERSTAND-- THE CITY-SPRAWL SIMPLY ENDED BACK THERE, GIVING WAY TO THIS... WASTELAND.
LOOKS LIKE THE EPICENTER OF A NUKE BLAST--
--AND I'LL BET THE COORDINATES PINPOINT GROUND ZERO.
CORRECT ON CALLING THE COORDINATES, JAKOSA, BUT WRONG ABOUT THE RADIATION-- NO TRACE OF IT AND NO NEED FOR SHIELDS OR ARMOR.
STILL, THERE MUST BE SOME REASON WHY THOSE INTERCEPTORS FADED AWAY FROM US--
--AND WHY THESE ARE THE ONLY SITES ON THE PLANET NOT COVERED BY WATER OR WALL-TO-WALL CITY.
SOUNDS LIKE A CUE TO RECONNOITER, LaMASQUE--LET'S GO.
YOU SURE THIS IS THE COORDINATES--?
LOOKS MORE LIKE A PLACE YOU'D DRAG YOURSELF INTO WHEN DEATH'S COMING ON...
IF YOU'RE A PROPHET, STARN, YOU'RE FIRED!
AND IF FIVE ELDERS ARE HERE, JAKOSA, GROD DOES NOT SEE THEM.
GROD SEES NO ONE.
MORE NEG-READINGS ON FALLOUT--WHICH I CLASSIFY UNDER MYSTERY. WHAT ELSE WOULD THOSE INTERCEPTORS BE AFRAID OF?

HEY! OVER HERE!!
LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE FOUND YOURSELF A BIG HOLE IN THE GROUND, STARN...
BUT HARDLY LEADING TO A NATURAL CAVE, LaMASQUE.
YOU GOT IT, JAKOSA--THESE STAIRS WERE CARVED BY MORE THAN EROSION.
AND SINCE CAVERNS HAVE BEEN SEDUCTIVE LURES SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL--NOT TO MENTION THE NINE MONTHS PRECEEDING BIRTH--THE SEVEN DAUNTLESS ADVENTURERS BRAVED THE FOREBODING DARKNESS AHEAD...
STOW THE NARRATION, SKREED...
WHOEVER CHIPPED OUT THESE STAIRS MAY HAVE TASTE.
JEALOUS AGAIN, STARN?
QUIET, BOTH OF YOU--THERE'S A TURN AHEAD...
AND AROUND IT: WONDER.
HAVEN'T SEEN ANYTHING THIS...MASSIVELY PRIMITIVE... AND MAGNIFICENT...
...SINCE MY GRANDMOTHER'S PHOTOGRAPHS OF PRE-CATACLYSMIC EARTH.
HATE TO HAVE BEEN ONE OF THEIR SLAVES.
IF THIS WAS BUILT BY THE SPIRITUALISTS, SKREED, IT WAS A WORK OF WILLFUL COOPERATION!
ALL RIGHT--WHO WANTS TO STAY OUT HERE WITH PHAEDRA?
WHOEVER STAYS OUT HERE, JAKOSA LONE--
--WILL STAY WITH ONLY YOUR NAMESAKE FOR COMPANY--ALONE.


DOES THIS MEAN YOU'VE JOINED THE TEAM, AMBASSADOR?
IT MEANS I'M TIRED OF BEING A PAWN PUSHED AROUND.
BY US OR THEM ?
BY ANYONE.
SPEAKING OF OLD EARTH, METHINKS THIS MUCH RESEMBLES THEIR NOTION OF HELL ...
YOU WOULD, SKREED.
THEN WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?
CAREFUL.
THE RIGHT SIDE.
DEAD END.
NOT SOFT, BUT NOT ROCK EITHER ...
...AND IT SEEMS TO YIELD SLIGHTLY.
THEN LET'S SEE IF WE CAN'T OPEN SOME--
--BLOOD?


THE WHOLE WALL--AND THEY'VE GOT FANGS!
SCOFF AT MY HELL NOW, YE SCURRYING LOUT!
OVER HERE, LaMASQUE!
STAY LOW--AND DRAW YOUR WEAPON, DAMMIT!

STARN!!
I'LL BE ALL RIGHT...
...UNLESS THE BASTARDS ARE VENOMOUS.
OVER THERE--PHAEDRA'S LOST HER WEAPON!
HOLD HER, SKREED!
I...
...I CAN'T--!!
BUT NOR CAN THE WINGED FANGER...

I BEG.N TO SEE WHY THE FIVE ELDERS ARE SO DAMNABLY "UN-REACHABLE"--

--BUT WHY MUST WE ALWAYS LEARN THESE THINGS THE *HARD* WAY?

YOU SPEAK *TOO SOON*, SKREED...

THERE'S AN EVEN *BETTER* REAGON FOR THEIR ALOOFNEGS...

THEY'RE *DEAD!*

THE FIVE WHO STARTED A MOVEMENT OF PEACE WHICH NOW THREATENS WAR...

THE FIVE WHOSE DREAMS SCULPTED HEAVEN-STONE..

...AND WHO ARE REVERED BY THEIR FOLLOWERS AS IF STILL *ALIVE*.

YES, JAKOSA LONE...THE SPIRITUALISTS CAN HARDLY SUSPECT THAT THEIR EXEMPLARS ARE NO MORE THAN DRY, DEAD BO--

WAIT-- LOOK AT THE *FARTHEST* ONE!

THE *SKULL*-- IT'S START-ING TO *GLOW*...

ENERGY MANIFESTS AS LIGHT.

AND THE LIGHT IS GLORIOUS.

AND THE GLORY INSPIRES AWE.

...T...IT'S LIKE THE THING WE FOUND ON ROUNDWALL...

GIVE ME A READING, LaMAGUE.

IT'S... ALIVE, JAKOSA... BUT NOT ALIVE!

IT IS BEYOND LIFE.

AND IF THE RAKOSIAN'S CERTAINTY STARTLES THE OTHERS... NO ONE QUARRELS.

AYE, GROD... AND IN ITS RADIANCE OF A THOUSAND SUNS--NAY, ITS VERY LIGHT OF LIGHTS--IT TURNS A CAVERNOUS HELL INTO HEAVEN.

THE SECOND LIFE...

...THE FINAL STATE OF ETERNAL GRACE EVERY HEAVENSTONER STRIVES TO ATTAIN...

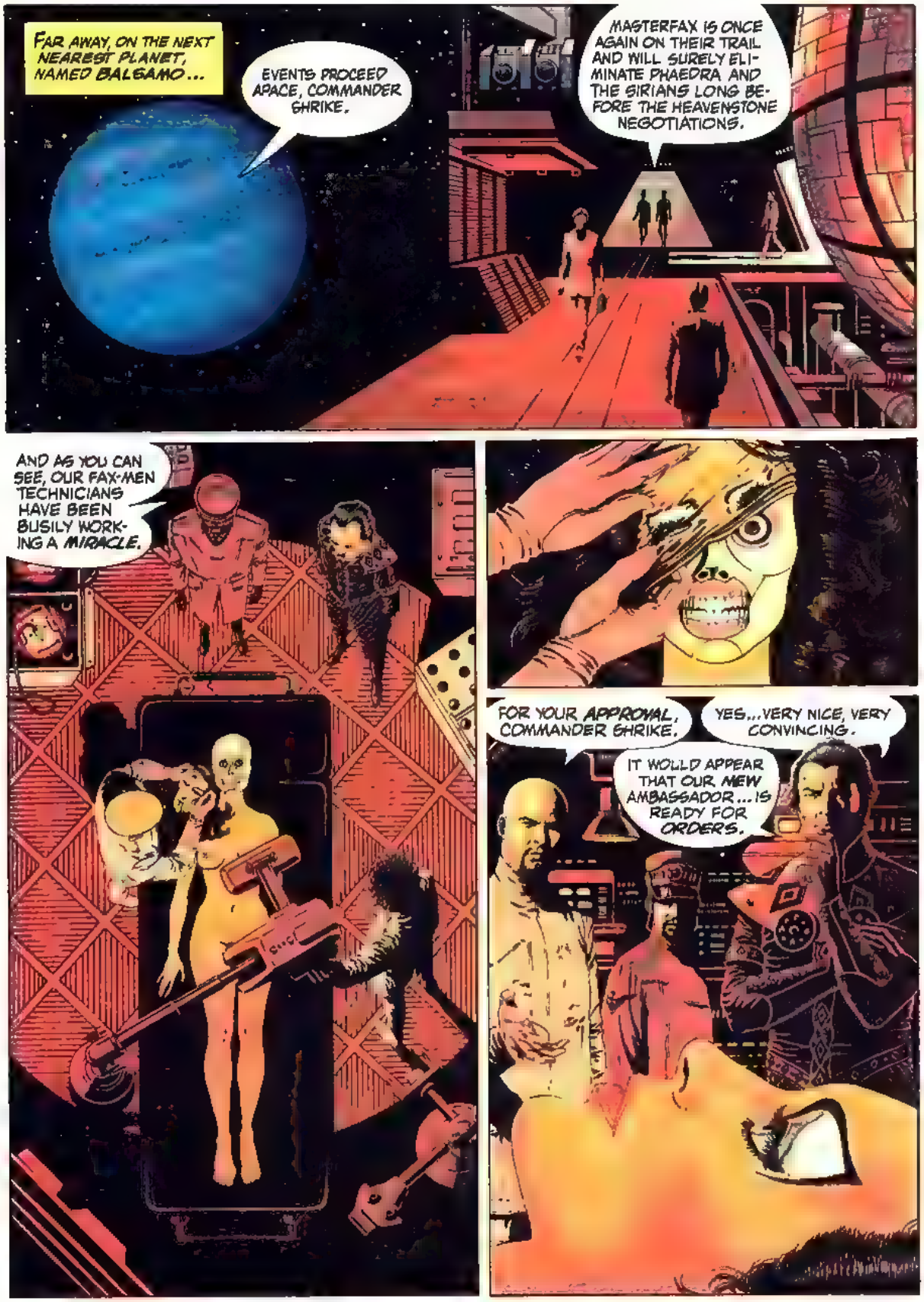
...THE ECSTASY BEYOND DEATH.

IT... "SPOKE"-- WITHOUT SOUND-- AND IT KNOWS MY NAME!

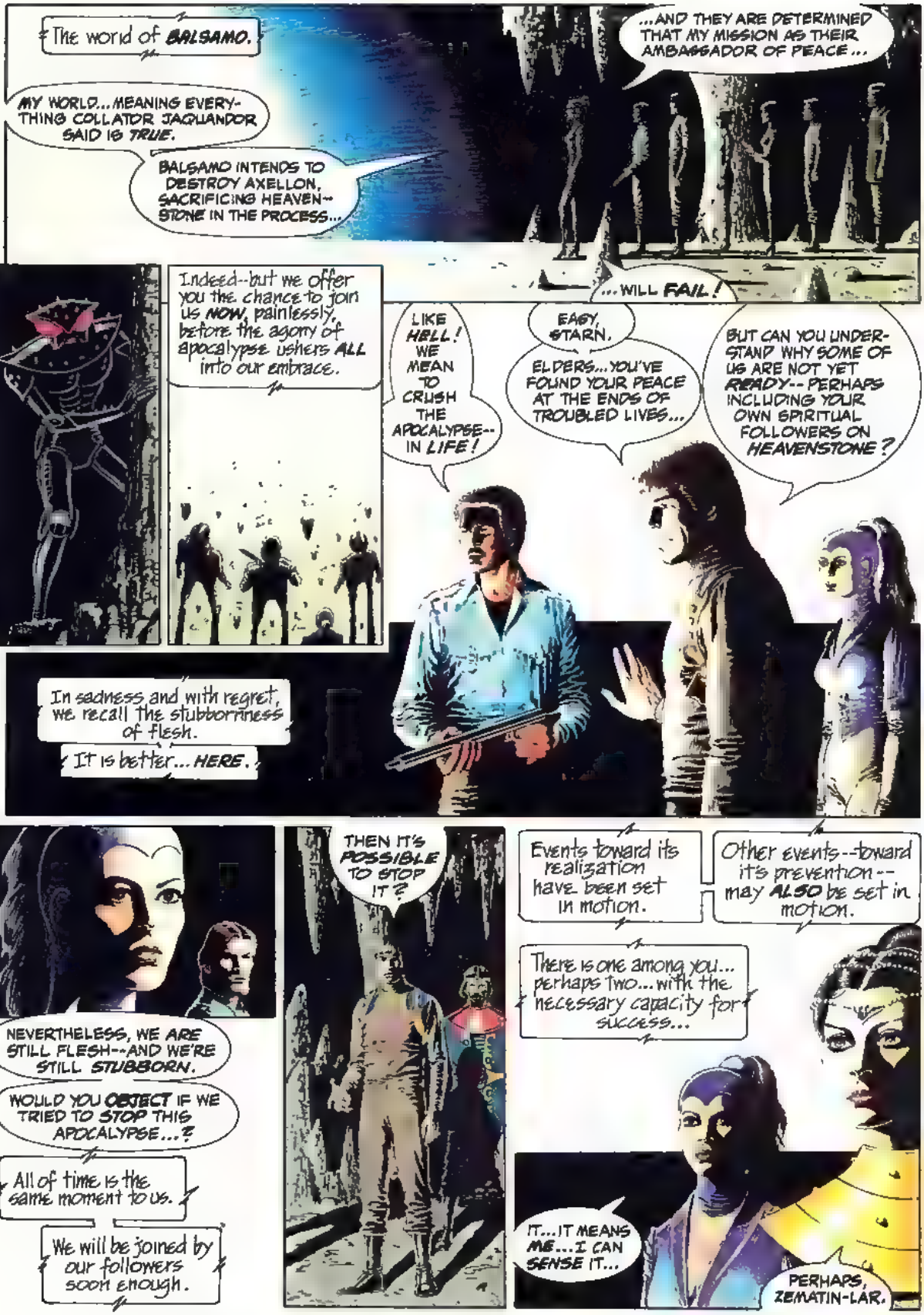
And the ecstasy, Phaedra, which resides in **EVERY** soul, waiting to be redeemed, waiting to be **RELEASED.**

We know all there **IS** to know.

WHO ARE YOU? WHAT ARE YOU?
LIFE--the life which was five but is now ONE and which seeks MORE, beckoning from beyond the veil of truth which yearns to encompass all...and EVERYONE.
THEN YOU ARE THE FIVE ELDERS--AND YOU'RE ALIVE--EVEN THOUGH YOUR BODIES ARE DEAD! BUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THIS AREA? WAS A BOMB DETONATED HERE?
The government of Axellon, in the darkness of ignorance, did indeed ignite a great flash... and we were forced to sacrifice our mortality...
...attaining the spiritual union of one, as well as the power therein. -power sufficient to NEGATE their bomb by ABSORBING its radiations of death.
Failing inevitably to slay the spark of true life within our souls, within EVERY soul, they have ever since feared and shunned the scene of their failure.
"LIFE, IN WHATEVER FORM IT IS FORCED TO TAKE, CANNOT BE DENIED. EVEN NOW, THE DEAD LAND ABOVE RETURNS TO LIFE, ITS BEASTS CHANGED BY THE VERY DEVASTATION WHICH SOUGHT TO SMOTHER THE NEVER-DYING SPARK.
"AND SO, IF YOU HAVE ENTERED THIS LAND OF THE DEAD REBORN WITH THE INTENTION OF SLAYING US, WE REGRET TO DENY YOU... AND INSIST, INSTEAD, THAT YOU JOIN US."


FAR AWAY, ON THE NEXT NEAREST PLANET, NAMED BALSAMO...
EVENTS PROCEED APACE, COMMANDER SHRIKE.
MASTERFAX IS ONCE AGAIN ON THEIR TRAIL AND WILL SURELY ELIMINATE PHAEDRA AND THE SIRIANS LONG BEFORE THE HEAVENSTONE NEGOTIATIONS.
AND AS YOU CAN SEE, OUR FAX-MEN TECHNICIANS HAVE BEEN BUSILY WORKING A MIRACLE.
FOR YOUR APPROVAL, COMMANDER SHRIKE.
YES...VERY NICE, VERY CONVINCING.
IT WOULD APPEAR THAT OUR NEW AMBASSADOR...IS READY FOR ORDERS.

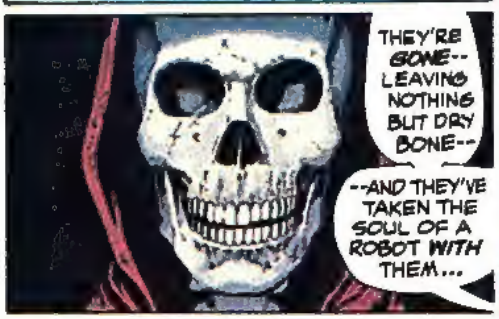
JOIN us...as will all the others soon to brighten our light...
IN DEATH--?
UH... I MAY BE DEVOTED TO PHILOSOPHY, BUT--
NOT...DEATH, STARN...
ACCORDING TO THIS READING, A FORM OF... NON-LIVING LIFE.
YES, LAMASQUE... THE SECOND LIFE...
SOMEHOW, THE SEMANTICS DON'T TEMPT ME.
...THE ECSTASY WAITING BEYOND THE CARES OF FLESH...
THE SIMPLE, PURE BLISS WE'VE ALL YEARNED FOR SINCE--
NO, PHAEDRA!
YOU CAN'T SUCCUMB TO IT-- NOT YET--NOT WHILE THERE'S STILL REASON TO CARE ABOUT FLESH-- ABOUT ALL THOSE LIVES ON THREE WORLDS, PHAEDRA!
THEY DESERVE THE RIGHT TO MAKE THEIR OWN CHOICES--
AND YOU MAY BE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN GIVE THEM THAT RIGHT!
ELDERS...YOU INVITE US TO JOIN YOU, "LIKE ALL THE OTHERS"...
ARE YOU IMPLYING THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS WILL BREAK DOWN--?
ARE ALL THREE WORLDS-- AXELLON, BALSAMO, AND THE MOON HEAVENSTONE-- DOOMED TO DESTRUCTION?
Events toward such an end have been set in motion, Jakosa Lone...
...although great pains have been taken to ensure the survival of ONE world...


The world of BALSAMO.
MY WORLD... MEANING EVERYTHING COLLATOR JAQUANDOR SAID IS TRUE.
BALSAMO INTENDS TO DESTROY AXELLON, SACRIFICING HEAVENSTONE IN THE PROCESS...
...AND THEY ARE DETERMINED THAT MY MISSION AS THEIR AMBASSADOR OF PEACE...
...WILL FAIL!
Indeed--but we offer you the chance to join us NOW, painlessly, before the agony of apocalypse ushers ALL into our embrace.
LIKE HELL! WE MEAN TO CRUSH THE APOCALYPSE--IN LIFE!
EASY, STARN.
ELDERS... YOU'VE FOUND YOUR PEACE AT THE ENDS OF TROUBLED LIVES...
BUT CAN YOU UNDERSTAND WHY SOME OF US ARE NOT YET READY-- PERHAPS INCLUDING YOUR OWN SPIRITUAL FOLLOWERS ON HEAVENSTONE?
In sadness and with regret, we recall the stubbornness of flesh.
It is better... HERE.
NEVERTHELESS, WE ARE STILL FLESH--AND WE'RE STILL STUBBORN.
WOULD YOU OBJECT IF WE TRIED TO STOP THIS APOCALYPSE...?
All of time is the same moment to us.
We will be joined by our followers soon enough.
THEN IT'S POSSIBLE TO STOP IT?
Events toward its realization have been set in motion.
Other events--toward it's prevention--may ALSO be set in motion.
There is one among you... perhaps two... with the necessary capacity for success...
IT... IT MEANS ME... I CAN SENSE IT...
PERHAPS, ZEMATIN-LAR.

..although it is far more likely that you will PERISH, joining us here even BEFORE the others. SOON.
SEEKING, DEATH EVENTUALLY FINDS US ALL--BUT IF WE SHOULD LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO PREVENT IT...WHAT WOULD WE HAVE TO DO?
DESTROY THE PARTICLE BEAM WEAPONS DEPLOYED ON HEAVENSTONE?
Weapons are but tools whose function is governed by the mind of the user; a hammer may smash a skull or build a temple.
WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO--
But is there not ONE among you who would join us NOW? You, Phaedra...aware of it or not, your spirit is ONE with us...
I...I DO FEEL AN AFFINITY--A SYMPATHY--WITH THE MOVEMENT FOUNDED ON YOUR EXAMPLE.
IN FACT, I ALMOST JOINED THOSE WHO MADE THE EXODUS TO HEAVENSTONE... BUT IN THE END... I WAS TOO PRAGMATIC... OR TOO AFRAID...
I DECIDED TO REMAIN ON BALSAMO...DOING WHAT I COULD TO FORESTALL THE DESTRUCTION OF HEAVENSTONE IN A POSSIBLE CONFLICT BETWEEN MY WORLD AND AXELLON.
We see...
...but our sight seeks MORE.
AHHHN!
NO!!
STOP IT! YOU'RE KILLING HER!!
LIGHT... THE LIGHT!
We have not harmed her, Jakosa Lone. We have merely ELEVATED her... to a COMMUNING.
FEEL SO... DIFFERENT...
EVERYTHING...LARGER... SHARPER... CLEARER...

AND BEYOND THE CLARITY... I SEE... OTHER THINGS...
EVERYONE-- OUT OF THE WAY--
--NOW!!
KRUMP
VUHHT
MASTERFAX AGAIN--!
BUT... IF HE SURVIVED THE HEART OF THE EXPLOSION WHICH DESTROYED OUR SHIP...
AYE--HOW COULD GROD STOP HIM... WITH A MERE BLASTER?
In communion with Phaedra, WE HELPED.
REAL BIG ON DEATH, AREN'T YOU?
TOO BAD MASTERFAX DOESN'T HAVE A SPIRIT TO JOIN YOUR LIGHT.
Oh, but he DOES, Starn.

The universe, and all it embraces, is ONE...
...including the works of man...
...for who is man but the work of a HIGHER force?
All things possess a spirit unique unto themselves yet shared by the All.
And though his light is small, and dim... Masterfax shall nevertheless join us...



SO MUCH FOR THE PRIDE AND PERMANENCE OF FLESH,
WHENCE NOW, JAKOSA?
TO THE MOON, SKREED. THE PEACE COUNCIL CONVENES IN SOME THIRTY CYCLES...
WE MAY AS WELL SPEND THE REMAINING TIME ON HEAVENSTONE AS ANYWHERE ELSE.
AS LONG AS IT'S FAR FROM THIS.
BUT, AS IF KNOWING MORE AND BETTER, FIVE SKULLS GRIN.
END PHASE II

SIX FROM SIRIUS CONTINUES NEXT ISSUE. ON SALE THE LAST WEEK IN JULY.

WRITER

Doug's first published work proved to be the most popular feature of his school's fifth grade monthly newspaper — a "true-life fantasy" comic strip entitled **My Dog Sandy** for which Doug handled both the writing and art chores. Frazetta was not worried.

Comic books and strips apparently obsessed the young Moench and he was just the right age for the tail end of EC, the prime of Carl Barks, the new **Flash** in **Showcase**, **Green Lantern**, **JLA**, the brilliant onslaught of Kirby, Lee, and Ditko . . . and then it *really* happened. First there was the "All in Color for a Dime" series in the sf fanzine **Xero**, then **The Comic Reader**, **Alter-Ego**, **On the Drawing Board**, **Masquerader**, and all the rst. Doug was hooked for life, attending one of the very first fan gatherings from which conventions would ultimately explode (other attendees included Jerry Bails, Roy Thomas, and Don Glut), and even producing a single issue of his own fanzine, entitled **Review**.

Doug's next endeavor of note was (things get a little hazy here) either the sword and sorcery novel **Parchments of the Damned** (for which he was $500 but which was never published, owing to the abrupt demise of Powell Paperbacks) or the writing, editing, and laying-out of a newspaper / magazine for Chicago's top-40 radio station WLS, called **Generation** — for which Doug lugged his huge tape recorder from hotel to motel interviewing the likes of the Who and the Monkees.

Shortly after this, Doug began writing fiction, articles, and book / movie / record reviews for a series of men's slick magazines (**Adam**, **Knight**, **Fling**, **Swingle**, **Man to Man**, etc.) — and also wrote pin-up copy, fabricating names and measurements for the anonymous models as he blithely went along.

Somewhere in the midst of all this, Doug's old friend Don Glut was striking it rich at Warren (**Creepy**, **Eerie**, and **Vampirella**) to the tune of 25 bucks a story. Wow, said Doug, I could do that just as good as *him*. Three 8-page stories were promptly send to Warren editor Archie Goodwin and just as promptly forgotten. Despite Doug's abiding passion for comics, that probably would have been that . . . except for one of those major turning points of the absurd kind: Archie bought all three stories on the same $75 check. More inevitably followed. Many more . . .

Just about the time Doug was branching out to Skywald, undergrounds, and the DC mystery and war books, he sleepily stumbled aboard the graveyard shift at the **Chicago Sun-Times**, whose film critic Roger Ebert had just written a piece on horror comics. Doug decided to inform Ebert that the piece was All Wrong. "Oh yeah? And who're *you*?" Moench replied: "The guy who *writes* those horror comics." Blinking only once, Ebert dragged Doug to Richard Takeuchi, editor of the **Sun-Times**' Sunday supplement **Midwest Magazine**. After some mutual reminiscence on Eisner's **Spirit**, Takeuchi and Moench agreed on a feature article describing "what it's like to write horror comics." The finished piece as accompanied by a full-color strip illustrated by Doug's buddy Russ Heath.

One fine day in 1973, the mail rendered response to a proposal made to publisher A.S. Barnes & Co.; it was a contract for a mammoth hardcover "coffee table" book to be called **The Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural**, exhaustively embracing everything from myth to ostensibly true phenomena to books, films, and comic books. Literally as Doug was about to sign the contract, the phone rang. It was Roy Thomas (who, no, did *not* remember Doug from that long-ago early fan gathering), offering a job at Marvel.

Comics beat the coffee table (the *research* involved!) and Doug found himself immersed in **Master of Kung Fu**, **Planet of the Apes**, **Werewolf by Night**, **Doc Savage**, **Inhumans**, **Fantastic Four**, **Hulk**, **Ka-Zar**, **Weirdworld**, and **Moon Knight** among many others. Interspersed were scripts for dramatic radio and LP records, a major piece of nonfiction for Hugh Hefner's **Oui** magazine, as well as myriad odds and ends.

Currently, Doug writes **Batman** and **Omega Man** for DC, **Aztec Ace** for Eclipse, and of course **Six From Sirius** for Epic Comics. Doug's comment on **Six From Sirius**: "So many years after our stint together on Shang-Chi and crew, working with Paul again is like coming home."

ARTIST

Although Paul Gulacy has illustrated fewer than fifty full-length comics in the last ten years, the meticulous quality of the work far outweighs the relative lack of quantity, sustaining him as one of the most popular and sought-after talents in the field.

In 1973, Paul was introduced by a mutual acquaintance to Val Mayerik, who also hailed from Youngstown, and the two artists quickly became friends. Aided by yet another Ohio-born comics artist, Dan Adkins, Val had already spent a year freelancing for Marvel. Impressed by Paul's portfolio, Val suggested a meeting with Adkinds, certain that Gulacy would similarly benefit from such association. Craig Russell was Dan's first protegé; Val followed a year later, and now it was Paul's turn.

Adkins encouraged the young artist to produce, for submission to Marvel, a sample short story in pictorial form only — a story with no dialogue, yet clearly exhibiting a recognizable and cohesive plot in its flow of images alone. This was just the sort of thing at which Paul excelled and he promptly tackled the challenge with enthusiasm.

The result, for an "unknown" artist, was stunning. After a quick exchange of phone calls, Paul was hired by Roy Thomas to begin work for Marvel.

The first year's output consisted of miscellaneous inking jobs and various black and white stories, ranging from **Daredevil** to **Dracula**. Following several other, non-series horror stories, Paul was assigned his first full-color comic in 1974: **Morbius the Living Vampire**. After only one issue, however, he was offered the option of retaining **Morbius** as a regular series or shifting his efforts to another title: **Master of Kung Fu**.

He chose the latter.

Teamed with writer Doug Moench, Paul shaped **Master of Kung Fu** into a true force to be reckoned with and its popularity quickly increased. The series won several awards, in Britain as well as America, for both artist and writer.

After two and a half years, however, Paul felt it was time to move on. Leaving comics almost entirely — except for occasional and eagerly awaited covers — he entered the lucrative but competitive field of commercial illustration.

It was not until 1978 that Paul returned to the comics scene, illustrating a graphic novel entitled **Sabre**, written by Don McGregor and published by Eclipse Enterprises.

In the next several years Paul's comics work continued to appear intermittently (and usually unexpectedly); there were new stories and cover paintings for Warren, Eclipse, and Marvel.

Paul's strong facility for compositional technique and his natural abilities in the area of visual storytelling uniquely qualify him for his recent work in advertising art, where he has designed compositional layouts for magazine ads and storyboards for television commercials.

Six From Sirius marks Paul's first major collaborative reunion with Doug Moench in some four years. A labor of love produced between other projects, the **Sirius** saga encompassed two and a half years of painstaking effort. The coloring is the result of an arcane and complex process of experimentation utilizing a variety of mediums, including acrylics, markers, colored inks and pencils. Paul is now at work on another comics project, also with Doug and also for Epic Comics.